

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 14, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing today in response to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) decision to remove from its website key documents regarding enforcement and oversight of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and Horse Protection Act (HPA), including inspection reports for all regulated entities and annual reports submitted by research laboratories.

We join a broad coalition of organizations – from animal welfare groups to pet store chains, biomedical research groups, and accredited zoos and aquariums – in urging the agency to restore comprehensive online, searchable access to these documents immediately in order to maintain ongoing transparency.

Congress passed the Animal Welfare Act and the Horse Protection Act decades ago, and in recent years Congress has provided tens of millions of dollars for enforcement of these laws. USDA annually inspects approximately 9,000 licensed facilities including commercial dog and cat breeding facilities, laboratories, zoos, circuses, airlines, Tennessee walking horse shows, and other operations. The work product of USDA employees executing these enforcement programs – invaluable information about both compliant and non-compliant licensees – is valued by lawmakers; the media; a variety of industries that use animals in commerce, exhibition, and research; the animal welfare community; and the general public. These are two of our nation's most important and broadly supported animal welfare programs.

The public has a right to know if regulated entities have subjected animals in their care to abuse or otherwise failed to meet basic welfare standards. Public access to information can guide consumer decision-making and plays an important role in deterring regulated entities from violating the law. Public release of inspection reports and laboratory annual reports increases pressure on entities to abide by the rules.

Access to these records has enabled the public to learn about many animal-care violations including by puppy mills, roadside zoos, and training barns engaged in cruel horse soring. It has also provided accountability for research facilities that violate the law, and allowed assessment of how many animals are used (often with taxpayer funding) for research that causes unrelieved pain.

Lack of access to AWA and HPA documents not only undermines these federal laws, but also interferes with state and local laws meant to protect animals and consumers. For example, seven states currently prohibit the sale of dogs from breeding operations with a history of serious AWA violations. Without ready access to inspection reports, dog sellers in those states will have no practical way to comply with these laws, and state and local law enforcement efforts will be severely impeded.

While the agency has indicated that the public can access these documents by submitting a request under the Freedom of Information Act, history has shown that such requests can take months, and even years, to fulfill. We should be increasing government transparency, not diminishing it and shielding those cited for violations of these key animal welfare laws. We hope you will immediately restore what was removed from USDA's website regarding the Animal Welfare Act and Horse Protection Act, and resume posting inspection reports, annual reports, and other animal welfare related documents so that the public can access them in an efficient and timely way.

Sincerely,



Martha McSally
Member of Congress



Lou Barletta
Member of Congress



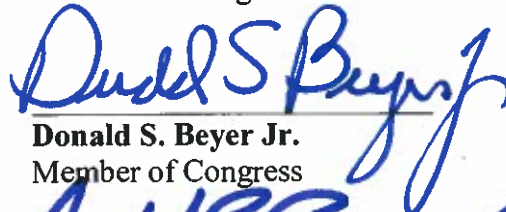
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress



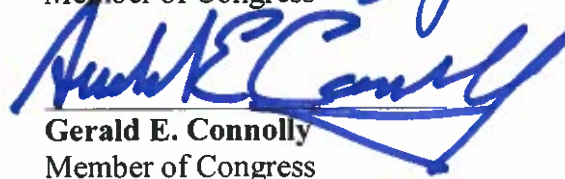
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress




Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

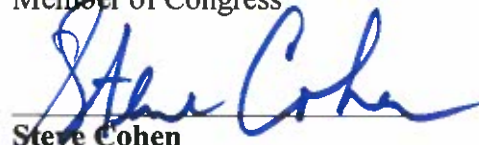


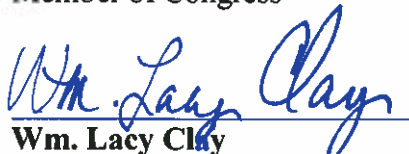
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress





Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress


Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress


Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress


Robert A. Brady
Member of Congress


Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Charlie Crist
Member of Congress


Hank Johnson
Member of Congress

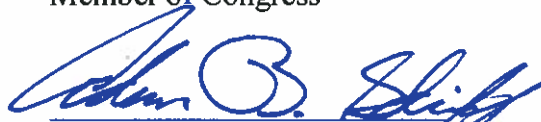

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress


Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Denny Heck
Member of Congress



John Lewis
Member of Congress


Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress


Adam Schiff
Member of Congress



Dan Lipinski
Member of Congress


Ro Khanna
Member of Congress


Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress

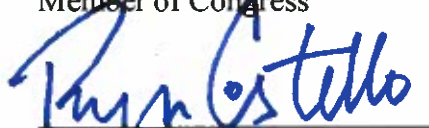

Tony Cardenas
Member of Congress

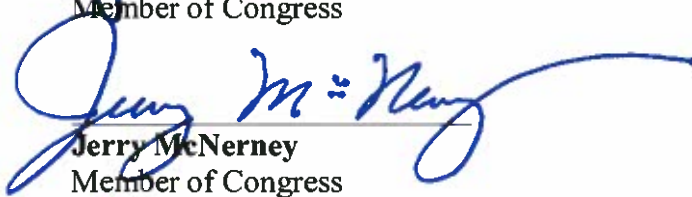

Adam Smith
Member of Congress


Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

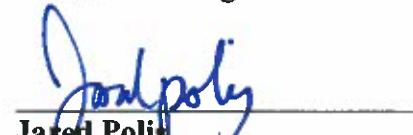

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress


Kyrsten Sinema
Member of Congress

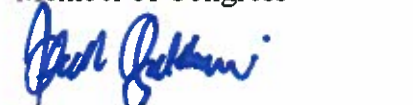

Ryan A. Costello
Member of Congress

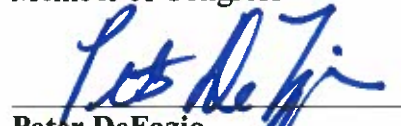

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

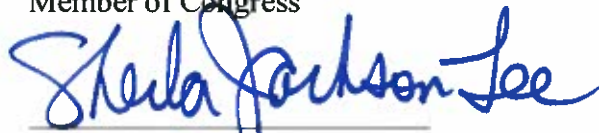

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress


Jared Polis
Member of Congress



Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

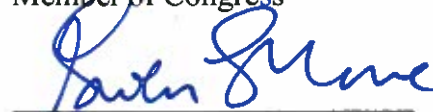

Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress


C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress


Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress

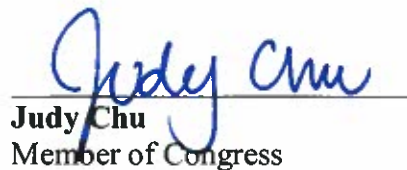

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress


Dina Titus
Member of Congress


Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



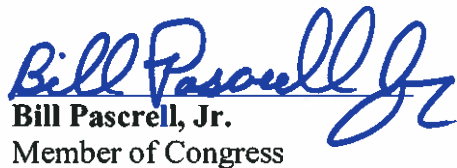
Jim Langevin
Member of Congress



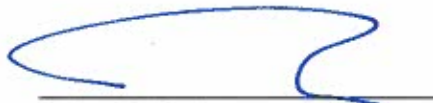
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



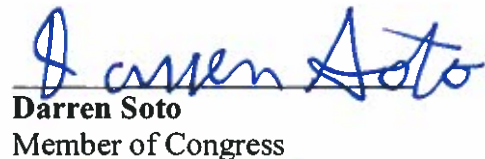
Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



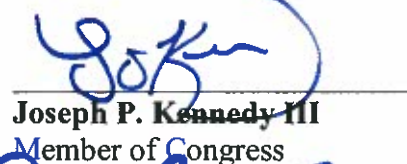
Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



John K. Delaney
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Joseph P. Kennedy III
Member of Congress



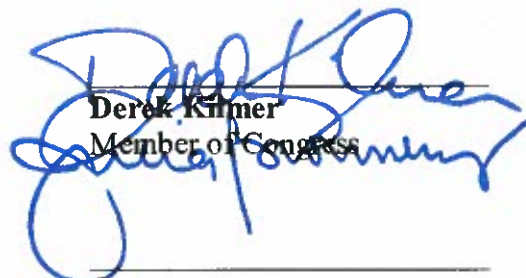
David Price
Member of Congress



Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

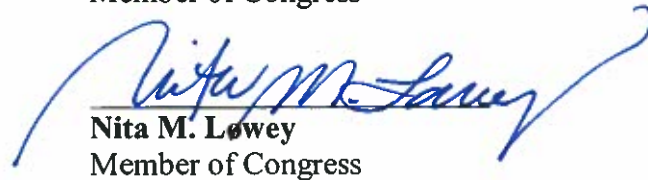


Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

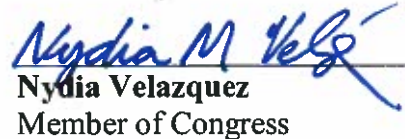
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress



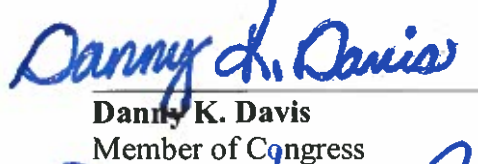
Paul Tonko
Member of Congress



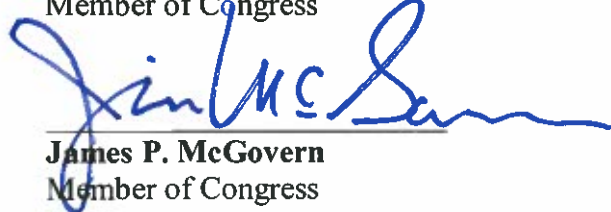
Nydia Velazquez
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sanchez
Member of Congress



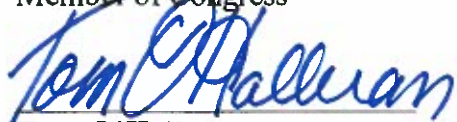
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



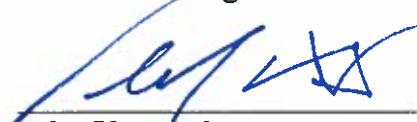
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



John Yarmuth
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



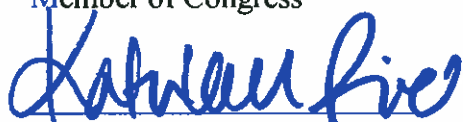
Michelle Lujan Grisham
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



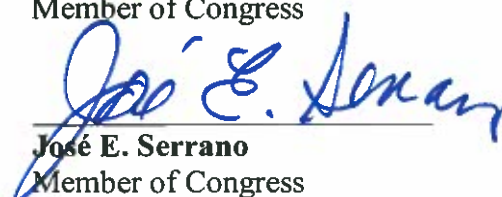
Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress



Kathleen Rice
Member of Congress



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress




José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress




Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



Rosa DeLauro
Member of Congress



Chris Smith
Member of Congress



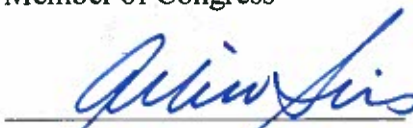
Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress



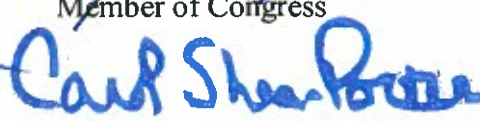
Thomas Marino
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress



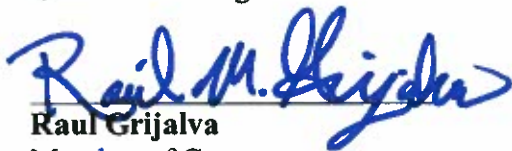
Frank A. LoBiondo
Member of Congress



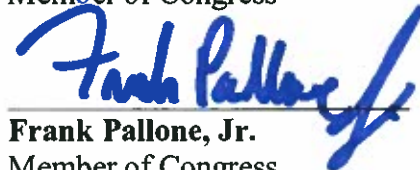
Peter Welch
Member of Congress



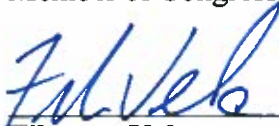
Madeline Z. Bordallo
Member of Congress



Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Filemon Vela
Member of Congress



Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress



David Joyce
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



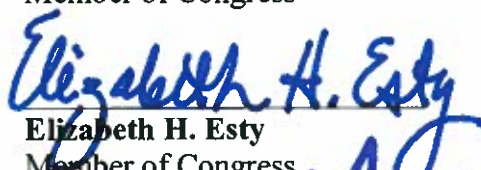
Katherine Clark
Member of Congress



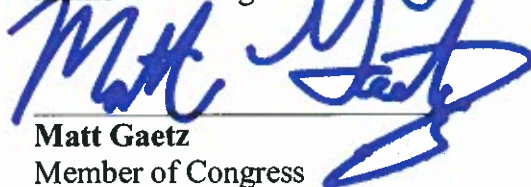
John Sarbanes
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Elizabeth H. Esty
Member of Congress



Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress



John Katko
Member of Congress